



RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL MUSICAL TRADITION IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

Odisha has a glorious tradition of music and dance is evident from the singing and dancing figures adorning temples in Odisha. The Odissi dance form which originated here is one of the oldest classical dance forms of India. Religion and music has marked a strong influence on the culture of Odisha. Followers of all religions and sect today live in harmony in Odisha, their magnificent journey of being ruled by the rulers of many religions have imbibed the qualities of tolerance amongst them. The intimate relationship experienced between the poetry and music in Odissi is a feature on which the aesthetics of the style is built. The musical accompaniment of Odissi dance is essentially the same as the music of Odisha itself. Heritage in Odisha has always been preserved, through art, culture, customs and traditions.

KEYWORDS: Odisha, Religion, Odisha, Jagannath, Devadasi

Like its excellent rich culture and vibrant tradition, dance and music of Odisha is also very charming, colourful and encompassing various types of tunes. The existing dance and musical tradition of Odisha is the cumulative experience of the last two thousand and five hundred years and can broadly be grouped under various varieties. Based on the practice and preparations, the music of Odisha is categorized into five sections. These are Folk music, Tribal music, Light Music, Light Classical music and Classical Music. Similarly the unique dance form of Odisha has contributed a lot to the classical dance, martial dance and typically traditional dance form of India. Hinduism of various sects is a central and unifying force in Odia society. The figures or dancers musicians Carved on ancient temple walls speak of Odisha's rich musical heritage. There were saint-poets of Odisha who composed lyrical poems to be sung. Bards usually went from place to place singing these songs which were meant to propagate religious ideas in various religions. Instructions were usually given by the poet himself as to how the lyric was to be sung, i.e. the raga or tune to be employed and the Tala or beat scheme to be followed. The present form of traditional Odissi music is no doubt the outcome of the continuous evolution of the earliest Indian classical music. One may reasonably believe its inflow during the period of Aryanisation of this land. Possibly Aryan culture crept into this land during the Age of Brahmins when bulk of Indian peninsula came under the Aryan influence. Music tinged with religion, attained mass appeal and royal patronage. As such the royal patronization of Art and Culture made the Odishan music so developed and enchanting for enjoyment of both Gods and Goddesses and human beings as well. This tradition is still continuous in its different manifestations. Odisha is the treasure house of folk Songs which are sung on different festivals and specific occasions in their own enjoyment. Folk music in general is the expression of the ethos and mores of the folk communities. Since, there is the dearth of recorded evidence to prove the exact time of the advent of the earliest form of the Indian classical Music into this land, we may reasonably believe its inflow during the period of Aryanisation of this land. Possibly Aryan culture crept into this land during the Age of Brahmins when bulk of Indian peninsula came under the Aryan influence. The Madala Panji or chronicles of the Jagannath Temple states that gods and other celestial beings attended the ceremony of the Pratistha or installation of the deity at the Jagannath temple in Puri. The standard of music in Odisha during the earliest period cannot be traced. From sixth century to eleventh century Odisha witnessed unprecedented cultural activities both in field of music and architecture. Poet Jayadeva composed Gitagovinda and for the first time in Odisha lyrics were composed by applying tune. Gitagovinda was performed by Devadasis in temple in honour of Jagannath and the form of music which has been sung in the world famous Jagannath temple at sacred Puri-Dham as a part of the temple services gradually took the form of traditional Odissi music as known today. Jayadeva ushered a new era in the history of Indian Classical music, which can be rightly identified as Jayadeva music. This great composer, musician, a saint-poet of Odisha was a great devotee of Lord Jagannath. The ingredients of the classical music like Raga-Tala-Geeta and Chhanda of Jayadev was introduced in the services of temple of Lord Jagannath and was accepted as temple music of Odisha. Various reasons are attributed to the discontinuance of the Mahari tradition of dance and the emergence of the Gotipua tradition. Gotipuas are young boys dressed as girls and made to dance. They were taught the dance by the Maharis. The Maharis themselves never performed outside the precincts of the temple. It was always inside the temple. The Maharis are initiated into the order after a compulsory marriage with the God. In a simple ceremony a piece of new cloth is taken out from the idol and is tied around the neophytes head. The Mahari Devadasi prior to her performance pays her obeisance to the deity and then bows to Rajguru. Then she begins her dancing to the accompaniment of

Mardala and Gini. The dance that takes place in the Nata Mandira during the morning offering conforms to pure dance that is Nritya. There is no song accompaniment to this dance. The second dance takes place during Bada Singar or bed-time in the innermost sanctuary exclusively for the deity. Here the dance is expressional and the songs used for accompanying the dance are taken from Geeta Govinda alone. Gotipua, the centuries-old art-form is performed by young boys, dressed up as females, to praise Lord Jagannath. Not an easy form to master, boys must begin learning the dance at an early age in order to perfect the tough acrobatic moves that it demands. Rigorous training and regular practice under the guidance of a guru goes behind the making of each gotipua dancer. Singing is also an art that the dancers must master. According to one theory, a section of Vaishnav preachers, who were opposed to the Devadasis dancing in the temples, introduced the practice of young boys dancing as girls. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is known to have performed in the procession of Lord Jagannath in Puri. He is known to have exercised considerable influence over the then ruling King of Odisha, Prataprudra Deva. The Sakhi Bhava, Mathura rasa Upasana, and offering of one's self as an attendant in a female form have since remained integral to gotipua dance. The soulful devotional lyrics, composed by medieval poets, further helped popularize Gotipua as a dance form depicting Krishnalila to be performed for Lord Jagannath. It was around this time that Odisha was undergoing several socio-political changes. With the Mughals and the Afghans striving to take control of the state, the culture of Akhadas came up wherein young boys were groomed as fighters to protect the temples. Gita Govinda in one sense means song of Govinda, in other sense Gita is Govinda. To sing Gita Govinda means to worship Govinda or Lord Jagannath. The supreme love between Lord Krishna and Radha has been enshrined in earthly mould. Gita Govinda is the quintessence of love between Radha and Krishna or human being with super being. Jayadeva has engirdled the transcendence with the transient in simple Sanskrit grandiloquence of Gita Govinda. The symphonic syntax set in rhymes, rhythms and ragas fascinates each reader and listener with ecumenical predilection. The sensuous and melodious effects of this superb, unparalleled piece of lyrical literature and classical music transgress all human heart, mind and soul. In this classic work, the poets milieu has established relevance to present and future generations in different cultural contexts.

The Odias worship Gita Govinda manuscripts with their home deities. Most of the Odias sing Gita Govinda as morning and evening prayer. They also worship Sri Jayadeva as an incarnation of Lord Jagannath. The recital of Gita Govinda is one of the unavoidable Sevas of Lord Jagannath. Each Odia believes Lord Jagannath as their National God. They recite Gita Govinda regularly to propitiate blessings of Lord Jagannath. There is a belief that when someone recites Gita Govinda in sitting position, Lord Jagannath listens in standing position and when the singer is in standing position the Lord listens it in sitting position. The Jagannath culture has always played a vital role in the process of socio-cultural integration of this vast country. It expressed the Indian concept of Dharma which aims at continuance of social solidarity and social well-being. From the temple records we can establish that drama presentations were frequently held in the temple courtyard of Jagannath Temple at Puri. The Gitagovinda recital formed an integral part of the temple ritual and temple dancers called Mahari were retained by the temple in its service. The tradition of Mahari dance slowly crossed the temple precincts and was carried on by Matha and other religious establishments. The dance began to spread with Radhahrisna bhakti engulfing the society of the time. Since women dancers were not available because of the social taboo, boy dancers were employed by Matha to perform the Gitagovinda dance and other Radha Krishna thematic dances before the public. Such dance performances

were necessary to entertain the people and arouse their religious curiosity. Utkal is considered as the land of arts and the music of this land shall remain forever. This is a land where, the sweet chirping sounds of birds amid the dense green forests here, the rhythmic sound beats produced by the waterfalls and rivers, the roaring sounds of sea waves exist only on this land and all these nature's gift's are reflected in the art, literature, music and dance of this land which is not found in other art forms.

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